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Inconvenient truths about our world - Calgary Sun, The (Alberta, Canada) - February 6, 2010 - page 15
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I'm a big believer in education -- especially at 8:30 every morning when I'm trying to get my seven-year-old out the door to school.

Between 9 a.m. and 3:30 p.m., a lot of learning goes on.

Reading, writing, spelling, math -- it's all good, even if my son questions how much knowledge he needs.

He is pretty convinced that halfway through Grade 2 he already knows enough to get on with his life and school is unnecessary.

Since his two future goals are to cure cancer and discover a way to make faster than light speed travel possible, I've suggested that he at least finish this year.

There aren't too many combination genetic researchers / astrophysicists I know of who don't at least complete Grade 2.

So we do our math and spelling homework every night -- usually under protest that we are by far the strictest parents known among his circle of friends and perhaps in Canada -- and wrestle with boots and missing gloves every morning to get out the door on time.

Recently, I've been faced with a different educational challenge -- explaining how some of the ideas about the world my son comes home with are not necessarily true.

RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION

A few months ago, he came home all full of righteous indignation about slavery.

That's a good thing -- slavery is wrong.

However, his scorn was limited to white people enslaving Africans.

They had clearly been teaching about the slave trade at school, but only that part about the American south.

I had to point out to my son that he had nothing to feel guilty about, since to my knowledge we had never had slaves (unless you count the way he treats my wife and me), nor had any of our ancestors.

Moreover, pretty much every culture at one time enslaved someone else, including Arabs enslaving Africans, Africans enslaving each other, Aboriginals enslaving members of other tribes, Asians enslaving other Asians, and Europeans enslaving a variety of people including other Europeans.

That slavery is pretty much universal doesn't make it right, but that slavery wasn't just a white thing was clearly an idea he had never considered (or been taught).

COLUMBUS ON TRIAL

Last month, the school newsletter came home congratulating some of the older students for a fine performance of a play they had written about putting Christopher Columbus on trial for crimes against humanity.

It didn't give away the ending, although I'm pretty sure it was in front of a stacked jury and even Eddie Greenspan wouldn't have been able to get Chris off.

How to explain to a seven- year-old that it is impossible to judge people from 500 years ago against modern

values?

Or that without this "war criminal" we wouldn't be here at all.

Next up was global warming.

I was warming up the car last week in minus 10 weather to take him to school, when he announced that I was **killing glaciers** in Antarctica by letting the car idle.

I am a self-admitted global warming skeptic.

Do I believe the climate is changing?

Absolutely.

Are humans to blame? That's the question that's harder to answer.

After all, the last ice age was 12,000 years ago and wasn't caused by idling SUVs.

However, this is heresy, and I don't want to send him back to school to face the environmental inquisition with honest but unpopular questions.

As for the glaciers versus letting my car warm up for three minutes, I put it to him this way: "We can always walk to school if you like."

There's nothing like a little perspective.

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